# THE OPINION OF PETER TVRNER DOCT: IN PHYSICKE, CONCERNING AMVLETS OR PLAGVE CAKES, WHEREOF PERHAPS some holde too much, and some too little.



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AT LONDON
Printed for Edward Blount.
1603. being the yeare of the great plague

# The opinion of *Peter Turner Doctor in Phisicke*, *concerning* Amulets or Plague cakes; whereof *perhaps some holde too much, and some too little.*

IT is very true gentle Reader, that *Arsenicke*, *Orpiment*, Sublimate *precipitate*, *Quick-siluer*, *Todes* and *Adders*, are in some sorte rancke and deadlye poysons in the highest degree. For dayly experience might teach it, though no learned writer had once mentioned it. But it followeth not therefore that there is no vse of them in Phisick or curing of diseases. For, to omit all the probable arguments taken from sweete Kirnels in bitter shels, precious Diamonds in the middest of course stones, and Pearles in base Oysters, alledged both by Philosophers

and Phisitians, to prooue that in most poysoned subiects may be the noblest remedies, it is euident by the practise both of learned and vnlearned, that they are often vsed both inwardly and outwardly. My selfe I haue diuers times and yet not without the warrant of good Authors both old and new, cured sundry extreame coughes and impostumated lungs with the fume of *Orpiment* administred by the mouth. My selfe also had the rebellious rootes of a Wen (after I had vsed *Sublimate* and *Præcipitate*, in vaine) well taken away with *Arsenick*. The place of the Wen being close by the ridge bone ouer-against the hart. I haue also many times both giuen, and seene giuen *Crude Mercurie*, that is Quicksiluer vnto children for the wormes, and that with good successe. As for *Sublimate* and *Præcipitate*, I referre me to any man of any reading or experience, whether they bee not dayly and vsually administred both within and without, and that with good successe, especially being brought as chymicall writers call it into Turbittes: *Toades* dried and giuen in powder inwardly prouoake vrine exceedingly, and outwardly applyed they stay bleeding most miraculously, and drawe forth the matter of the plague into themselues, without breaking of the parties skin, or any other harme. Concerning *Adders*, who knoweth not that from them the *Triacles* haue their names in Greeke, because they are the

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Basis or most principall ingredient whereof they are compounded. Now if the fume of *Orpiment* may be taken inwardly, and the substance of *Arsenick* applyed to Vlcers and raw wounds, wherein is as much danger of poysoning as by swallowing of it, as may appeare by the speedie death of wilde beasts vpon the least raising of their skinnes with Arrow-heads dipped in *Toxicum* and such like poysons: I know no cause why a man should be afraide to weare them (especially inclosed in silke) vpon the whole skin. Neither how they can be perpetually opposite to mans nature. Nay if that be a true and sufficient definition of poyson *At no time to agree with nature*. I see not how these things may simply be called poysons, that sometimes and in some cases as hath bin shewed agree with nature as well as a man would wish. As for that point that somtimes they blister the skin, and cause angry wheales or pumples to arise, seeing that inconuenience may be both easily preuented and as easily cured, & commeth onely but by the wearers default it needeth not to terrisie any man from the vsing of them. For if the wearer of these Amulets or plague cakes, assoone as they begin to sweat, either take away the Cake, or put linnen enough betweene it & the skin, or sew it in thicker stuffe, or anoint the place with oyle or any vnctuose thing, they may be free enough from that inconuenience.

And if assoone as it beginneth to breede any itching, or raise any pimple, they remooue the cake for a day or two, and annoint the place with a little creame or *Vnguentum album Camphoratum*, they shall not neede to complaine of any deepe or foule holes or vlcerations. And yet it may be a question worth the considering, whether to haue such things arise, be not rather a benefit where they appeare, then a harme. For seeing the same effect or accident hapneth not to all that weare them, nor to all that sweate, it may seeme that only they are subiect to such blisterings in whome there is some venemous matter, which nature by the helpe of the medicine laboureth to expell. And as worthy the consideration it is, now we talke of blistering and corroding, to call to remembrance, how *Garleeke*, *Mustart*, and *Rosa solis*, the hearbe, being greatblisterers of the skinne, are not for that condemned for poysons, nor refused to be taken into the stomach. The ioyce of a Limon will graue vpon a knife as well as *Aqua fortis* or strong water, and yet who euer had any harme by taking of it inwardly. To blister therefore or corrode the skinne, is not a sufficient argument to proue a thing a poyson. It is also very euident both by experience and reason, that things outwardly applyed haue action, and worke into the body by communicating their spirituall qualities (as I may call them) to the spirites of our bodyes.

by the meanes of the warmth that openeth our pores, and rarefying the ſubtill parts of the medicine, is the cauſe of a reciprocate action and paſſion, as may appeare by purging ſimples and plaiſters. And herevpon, notwithſtanding what hath beene aboue ſaide, and perhaps not ſufficiently wayed, it may ſeeme ſtrange to ſome how *Arſenick* & ſuch like ſtrong poyſons, hauing ſo ſtrong poyſoning ſpirits, ſhould not alſo poyſon our ſpirits wherefoeuer they meete. For the better ſatiſfaction of ſuch as are not carryed away with former præiudice, and are capeable of theſe matters, this is in briefe my anſwer.

*Arſenick* and *Orpiment* are no wayes poyſonus or hurtfull to nature, but by their corroſiuenes or fretting qualities: otherwiſe they are as good, if not better, both preſeruatiues and curers as any other moſt in vſe: and therefore ſo long as they are kept from corroding or fretting, they can doe no harme, but may doe much good in that kinde, which they reſpect: That is to ſay, in all *Arſenicall* diſeaſes, as the Plague, the Pluriſie, *Noli me tangere*, Canckers and Fiſtulas, and all of that kinde. If thou deſire this to be confirmed vnto thee by example or experience, to wit, that they may be kept from corroding: Beholde the Mounte-bankes or Quackſaluers of Germany and Italy, who before they play their parts before the people, drinke firſt in their lodgings for that purpoſe halfe a pinte or

more of Sallat-oyle, and then comming to their stage, take inwardly in all mens sight incredible quantities of these poisons, and then taking nothing after them but their Triacles which they haue to sell, make their beholders beleeue that by them they be preserued from all harme. (Of this thou mayest see more at large in *Mathiolus* in his Commentaries vpon *Dioscorides*) whereby it appeareth as I saide before, that they may be kept from fretting or corroding of the inwarde parts, which granted, it followeth that the like may be done outwardly, and so be worne safely vpon the bare skin, notwithstanding their corrosiue qualities be no wayes taken away. But if they may be cleane taken away, as all that are well practised in chimicall præparations do affirme, I see no reason why they should be so feared, especially to be applied outwardly. And why should it not be as possible to remooue the corrosiue qualities of minerals from their bodies, as well as to remooue the burning quality of *Aron* rootes, called in English *Starch-worte*, or *Wake-Robin* from them, which I haue seene done, & then as pleasant bread made of them as of any other graine: or as well as to remooue the bitternesse of the gall of an Oxe, which my selfe haue done, and brought it to be as sweete as the ioyce of Liquorice, and then administred it with good successe in the yellow Iaundisse. But suppose that this were impossible: why may there

not be as ſure a way to correct that qualitie by minerall meanes as there is to correct the offending qualities of *Scammony*, *Agarick*, *Helleborus*, *Euphorbium* and ſuch like by their like, that is by Vegitables? Is it abſurd, nay is there not great probabilitie to thinke that God hath in nature appointed minerall *Alexipharmaca* præſeruatiues or remedies againſt the greateſt poiſons in that kinde, when we ſee that in vegitables he hath in his great mercy and prouidence created an *Antithora* for a *Thora*, and an *Antieuphorbium* for *Euphorbium*, I thinke not. And if neede were I can name ſome, but that ſuch ſecrets ought alwayes to remaine with them that know them. Now if any man not ſatiſfied with that which hath beene ſaide, obiect yet farther, that I haue proued but the halfe of that which they expected. That is, that theſe Amulets may be ſafly worne without any harme, not ſhewing the other more neceſſary part, that they may do any good. For ſatisfying all ſuch, (although there is enough ſaid to thoſe that hold them dangerous, which is the queſtion now in controuerſie,) I will farther yet briefly tell you my opinion of that point alſo, vpon that ſmall knowledge (yet dearly bought) which I imagine I haue in chimicall matters, partly by my own experience, & partly by reading of the profeſſors of that arte: I aſſure my ſelfe that there is in theſe minerals which the Alchimiſts cal their ſpirits good ſtore of gold, or to

speake a little plainer of the spirits of golde: and from thenee in my opinion it hath that incredible and admirable operation in preseruing of our spirits from infection. For the better confirmation of this my supposition, to wit, that minerall spirits are not without parte of the mettals from which they come; If you will demaund of the refiners or meltars downe of mettals, what the reason is why many times they cannot get the golde or other mettals which they know to be in their Ores or Owres, they will answer you that the aboundance of the wilde spirites that are in them when they bring them to the blast, carry away all the metall with them, which they doe by eating of them vp as strong waters vse to doe. But if thou haddest rather heare what the learneder sorte that deale with such things holde of these matters. Then read what is written in a treatise of *Arsenick* by *Theoprastus Paracelsus*, who was absolutly the most learnedst chimicall writer and worker that euer wrote: And if thou hast any insight in this kind of Philosophie, whereby to vnderstand him, he will satisfie thee of the natures of these things to the full. As for the authorities of such Phisitians or Philosophers which are not acquainted neither with the chymicall theory nor practise, I holde their censures as insufficient, for want of knowledge of those things which they dislike: & therefore how many soeuer they be in number, so long

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as they vnderstand not what they reprehend, it maketh no great matter: and yet if this controuersie were to be debated by authorities, my opinion should not be lesse assisted then any others. But seeing it would be both tedious and needlesse for the readers to be troubled with such allegations, I wil not take that course at this time, in which my intent is only to let them know what my opinion and practise is of these things. Yet least it might be thought that I haue none but poore *Paracelsus* on my side, I will translate for them that vnderstand no Lattin, a fewe lines concerning these Amulets and Plague cakes, out of a little Treatise of the Plague of *Iohannis Pistorius* a learned Phisition of *Germanie*; his wordes are these. *Many* Italian *Phisitions are of that opinion, that there was neuer a more excellent thing (speaking of these Amulets) graunted to mortall men by God, to preserue them from the Plague, and therefore call it a diuine medicine inuented by God, and take it vpon their oathes that neuer any fell sicke that wore them, and so much the more and the better I like of them, saith* Pistorius, *because their notable profit or vertue is confirmed by experience, and made manifest to the senses*, and a few lines after he saith further. *And so much the more am I mooued to like of them, because in the yeare 64. in* Zurick, *I neuer knew any amongst a great many that wore them to get any harme by them, or dye of the Plague, notwithstanding the great conuersation that*

*the sound had with the sicke, according to the custome of that place. And at* Basill *the like was obserued.* As these things (gentle reader) moued the foresaid *Pistorius* to allowe and prescribe these Amulets to his patients, so haue the same (together with my owne long obseruations) done the like with me, and so hauing as I promised brieflie, set downe my opinion, I commit thee to the head Physition, who send thee health both of soule and body.

*Maledictus qui ponit carnem brachium suum:* that is in effect; Accursed be he that putteth his whole confidence in secondary meanes, for it is neither hearbe nor salue, nor any thing els that healeth, but onely the blessing of the head Physition. And herevpon it may fall out sometimes that they who commit superstition or Idolatrie (as I may cal it) in wearing of these Amulets, may now and then notwithstanding miscarry, but it were pittie for that cause to derogate from the credite of so noble and generall a medicine, for a few perticular instances.



*FINIS.*